



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

FEB 24 2015

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of January 28 to National Security Advisor Susan Rice regarding the Administration's program to admit Syrian refugees to the United States. We have been asked to reply on her behalf.

First, we appreciate your recognition of our nation's proud history of welcoming refugees from all over the world. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has historically enjoyed broad bipartisan Congressional support and your leadership will be vital to continuing this record.

For decades, U.S. communities have welcomed refugees fleeing the world's most dangerous and desperate situations. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has provided a new start to more than three million vulnerable refugees in the period since 1975, unlocking human potential that might otherwise have been squandered. President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry are determined to ensure that this life-saving and life-changing program meets the highest security standards, including in the admission of Syrian refugees.

Reports of the intended admission of tens of thousands of Syrian refugees by the end of 2016 are incorrect. The United States anticipates admitting 1,000-2,000 Syrian refugees for permanent resettlement in Fiscal Year 2015 and a somewhat higher number, though still in the low thousands, in Fiscal Year 2016. Throughout, our emphasis will be on the most vulnerable – particularly female – headed households, children, survivors of torture, and those with severe medical conditions.

The Honorable

Candice S. Miller, Chairman,

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security,

Committee on Homeland Security,

House of Representatives.

In light of the nearly four million Syrian refugees currently hosted in neighboring countries, these figures represent a very modest but still important contribution to the global effort to address this crisis. The refugee population we focus on often has special needs, which can heighten the burden on host countries. U.S. leadership has also been instrumental in securing commitments from 25 other states to consider resettling Syrian refugees.

As Administration officials have testified before yours and other Congressional committees, the security screening of refugee applicants for U.S. admissions is an utmost priority. Every refugee under consideration for U.S. admission undergoes rigorous, multi-layered biometric and biographic screening involving multiple intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense, to ensure that those admitted are not known to pose a threat to our country. Indeed, applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program are currently subject to more security checks than any other category of traveler to the United States.

The Administration has taken a number of steps in recent years to further intensify refugee screening, significantly informed by the long-standing program for Iraqi refugees, as discussed in your letter. Our Syrian screening effort has greatly benefited from the lessons of the Iraqi admissions experience and, mindful of the particular conditions of the Syria crisis, Syrians will undergo additional screenings, the details of which we are happy to share in a classified setting.

Since 2009, the Administration has provided numerous refugee security screening briefings and we stand ready to provide additional briefings at your convenience.

Thank you for your leadership on this matter, which is both vital to the security of the homeland as well as instrumental to our nation's continued humanitarian leadership.

Sincerely,



Julia Frifield
Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs